



LINCOLN CHAFEE

U.S. SENATOR

RHODE ISLAND

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CHAFEE CO-CHAIRS HEARING TO EXAMINE AVIAN FLU

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, **U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-RI)** joined **Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN)** in chairing a hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to examine the potential for a possible Avian Influenza pandemic and strategies for preparedness. Discussed were ways to combat an outbreak of Avian Flu and improve global preparedness. The committee heard testimony from two panels of experts.

“There is general consensus that an influenza pandemic will occur at some point. The influenza H5N1, commonly known as bird flu, thankfully has not mutated to spread easily among humans,” Senator Chafee said. “However, the mortality rate is 55 percent of those humans who have been affected. In 1968, by comparison, that influenza killed roughly .6 percent of those infected. This is an extremely disturbing statistic, and I am pleased that this hearing has been called to take a proactive approach to assess our overall preparedness should a pandemic occur.”

“This is not only a health crisis, but a crisis that could affect all areas of society. For instance, there are estimates that a pandemic could cost the global economy \$1.35 trillion. By way of comparison, the SARS virus cost \$30-\$50 billion, seriously affecting China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Canada, in addition to having severely negative effects on the world’s economy, poverty, and major industries such as airlines and tourism,” he continued.

Chafee questioned panelists on global coordination efforts, the importance of international partnerships, and funding needs for prevention. Using complications from the SARS epidemic as a blueprint, Chafee and the panelists addressed the need for multilateral approaches to this problem.

Economic implications of a global pandemic were also examined, including the effects of economic disruptions on the world’s ability to combat such a situation. The panel and the Senator agreed that cooperation among governments was the most effective way to combat a possible outbreak.

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Senator Chafee then directed the discussion toward incentives for farmers to report cases of Avian Flu even when it may mean they will lose everything. This topic was recently discussed at International Conference on Avian Flu in Geneva, Switzerland.

The panelists alluded to the lack of incentives for poor third world farmers to report outbreaks in chicken flocks, knowing it would result in the loss of the entire flock, possibly resulting in a total loss of profits for an entire year or more. Chafee seconded the sentiment by alluding to a 2003 incident in Rhode Island where there was an outbreak of a non-deadly form of Avian Flu at a local farm. When the entire flock had to be destroyed, the senator worked with the farm to secure compensation for the lost profits, and described the difficult process that was undertaken to recoup some of the losses. In light of the problems associated with compensation in this advanced nation, Chafee and the panel discussed how to encourage those in poor, developing countries to come forward when faced with infected livestock.

Chafee and the panel also talked about our preparedness in light of the possibility of multiple waves of mutating viruses, and what action should be taken. The discussion also touched on the history of pandemics and the lessons learned from those instances.

“We’ve heard a lot about the parallels between the situation in New Orleans and the possibility of a flu pandemic. The greatest parallel is that we know the danger now and we can’t take the chance of being caught unprepared again. We can’t protect ourselves alone. We must work with the international community to have any chance of success,” Chafee added.

Panelists included the following:

Panel 1:

The Honorable Paula J. Dobriansky
Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs
Department of State
Washington, DC

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci
Director
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
National Institutes of Health
Department of Health and Human Services
Bethesda, MD

Dr. Julie Gerberding
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Department of Health and Human Services
Atlanta, GA

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The Honorable Andrew S. Natsios
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC

Panel 2:

Laurie Garrett
Senior Fellow for Global Health
Council on Foreign Relations
New York, NY

James Newcomb
Managing Director of Research
Bio-Economic Research Associates
Cambridge, MA

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